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ABSTRACT

This booklet examines issues related to time in education. After describing the increasing number of roles teachers play in their schools and their lack of time to do everything, the booklet explains that in order to achieve improved student outcomes, teachers need time to do their work. Teaching requires time for professional development, leadership activities, peer collaboration, parent partnerships, and school improvement. The use of time in schools indicates what is important to the school community and is usually reflected in the school's schedule. Scheduling reveals how much time is allocated to each subject and how much flexibility exists for differences in students, teaching, and content. Teachers need daily time for planning, collaborating, communicating with families, professional development, and school improvement. Two consecutive periods per day or several longer periods per week are preferable to one short period at a time. To prevent complications in scheduling as the year progresses, disciplined planning and scheduling at the beginning of the school year is necessary. Schools can create time by using block scheduling, restructuring or rescheduling time, changing staffing patterns, and adding time to the school day or year. (SM)

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Brief discussions of critical issues in Urban Education

On Point...

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On Time and How to Get More of It

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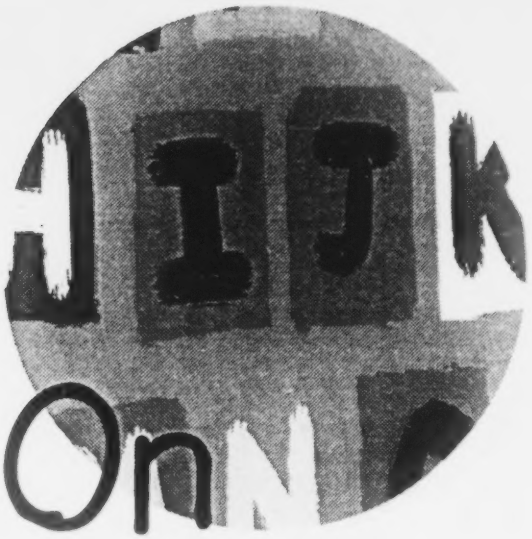

Time and How to Get More of It

Time! Time! We Don't Have Time!

Today's schools are striving to meet the challenges of systemic reform and school improvement. It is a big and complicated job. Achieving real, lasting change requires that everyone in schools stops, thinks, and works together to make the kinds of changes that need to occur.

In the midst of such demands, however, teachers find themselves with more to do in the same amount of time, or even in less time, than they have had in the past. Educators must use curriculum and teaching strategies that address the challenges presented by multiple languages and cultures, poverty and health issues, homelessness, problem behaviors, and disabilities or other differences that make learning difficult for a large number of students. They must also participate in a variety of planning, evaluating, learning, and other activities that require them to spend time outside of the classroom. Collaborating with colleagues to plan curriculum and team teaching, engaging in

professional development to maintain current skills and acquire new ones, working to create partnerships with families for decision making about their children's education, and participating in practice-based inquiry and reflective practice are just a few of the activities that have become part of the job of teaching. Teachers also play a greater role in decision making in their schools and districts through membership on building leadership teams, site councils, and other leadership activities. In short, a typical teacher today needs time to:

- Become familiar with existing curriculum and contribute to the creation of new and innovative curriculum
- Plan, prepare, and teach lessons to implement the curriculum for students with diverse learning needs
- Collaborate with other teachers to integrate curriculum content
- Master and use effective instructional techniques that directly involve students in their learning
- Grade papers and assess student progress
- Engage in ongoing professional development opportunities
- Participate in school leadership and cooperative decision making
- Learn and use new technology to improve teaching and productivity for students and for themselves
- Participate in state- and district-level professional activities
- Give individual attention to students
- Reflect with other teachers about their learning and teaching practices
- Get to know parents well enough to form productive partnerships and establish effective communication

It's a long list. And most teachers say that they simply do not have the time it takes to do everything they know they need to do to feel satisfied with their efforts.

Time Matters!

In almost every analysis of school change over the last decade, ***having enough time*** emerged as a key issue. To achieve improved student outcomes, teachers need time to do their work. To achieve successful schools, teachers need to frequently

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discuss practice, collaboratively design materials, and inform and critique one another's efforts. Even in schools where time for collaboration and planning is a priority, carving extra minutes and hours out of an already full day or week requires innovative scheduling and creative use of resources. Teachers already spend many hours outside of the school day, including evenings and weekends, to do their work.

Teaching Requires Different Kinds of Time

We need to rethink what teaching includes. *Teaching* used to mean the time an adult stood in front of a group of students. Now we are discovering that teaching also means ongoing professional development, collaborative work with colleagues, teacher leadership activities, development of parent partnerships and work on other aspects of the overall improvement of the school. These activities are part of a new definition of teaching. Such redefinition means that the work taking place outside the classroom is not extra duty or release time activity, but a critical component of teaching that contributes significantly to student achievement. In some countries, teachers spend as little as 50 or 60 percent of the school day working directly with students. They use the rest of their day for other activities that enrich and enhance the time they do have with students.

Changes in the use of time are not easily made nor do they happen quickly. Every school and district has some unique needs and differences in priorities, and schools organize and schedule activities differently. Of course, available resources may also vary from school to school, district to district. Changes that require additional funds and/or staff may be more difficult to achieve in some schools. There are also significant differences between the structure and scheduling of time in secondary and elementary schools. All of these variations make it impossible to find simple solutions that will work everywhere.

Some Principles for Allocating Time

The use of time in schools reflects what is important to the school community and is usually reflected in a school's schedule. Scheduling reveals, for example, how much time is allocated to each subject and how much flexibility exists for differences in students, teaching, and content. Changing a schedule will not automatically improve instruction, but wise allocation and productive use of time increases the chance

more student learning will occur. In many schools, there is actually more time for collaboration and planning than people realize, but inefficient scheduling and poor use of the time that is available minimizes the opportunities it provides. The following broad ideas about how to use time in today's schools might help school personnel rethink how time gets used and how that use reflects their school's priorities:

- Teachers should have time *each day* for use in planning, collaboration, communication with families, professional development, and other activities that relate to their teaching or to school improvement efforts.
- Two consecutive periods in a school day, or several longer periods throughout the week, are better than one short period at a time.
- The district and school should formalize collective staff time. Time for teacher work should be provided by the system and be built into the structure, the plan, and the schedule in such a way that it is ongoing and predictable.
- To prevent a schedule that is plagued by *add-ons* as the year goes along, disciplined planning and scheduling at the beginning of the school year should itemize what time will be used for; how much is needed, and when it will be used. A sharp staff focus, a match between time and activities, and refraining from adding on more than was planned originally should keep the schedule manageable.

How do Schools *MAKE* Time?

A common strategy for making time, particularly in middle and high schools, is block scheduling. This strategy involves arranging time in longer blocks that combine subjects or topics that were previously taught in smaller units of time. This results in both fewer classes and more opportunities for teachers to design teaching that integrates several areas of content. Block scheduling accommodates such time consuming activities as lab experiments, provides more time for practice or field-based learning, and permits exploration of innovative instructional practices and strategies that demand more time. Teachers in schools with block schedules work with fewer students each day, and prepare for fewer classes, so there are fewer minutes spent transitioning from class to class – time that can be reallocated to learning.

Another benefit of block scheduling is the creation of common planning time. With fewer classes to teach, and longer preparation periods each day, it is easier to align common planning periods for teachers to work together. If special education or other support teachers are included in the schedule, they can help to design curriculum and

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incorporate planning for students with special needs into the lesson plans.

A final important consideration is that block scheduling accommodates differences in the amounts of time individual students require to learn and master skills. Because lessons are longer, students who learn quickly and work at a more rapid pace can enjoy opportunities for enrichment activities, while students who need more time can take it without the stigma attached to make-up classes or pull-out services.

Obviously, not every strategy for finding or creating time will work in every school and block scheduling is only one. Nevertheless, many schools have been trying different strategies for providing teachers with the time they need. These strategies cluster into three broad categories: restructuring or rescheduling time; changing staffing patterns; and adding additional time to the school day or year.

Restructuring or Rescheduling Time

- Teach more minutes four days a week and use the time earned to have early release on one day.
- Trade in staff development days at the beginning or end of the school year and spread the time out throughout the year for planning time.
- Stagger the schedule to accommodate morning/evening students. For example, start school earlier for students who do well in the morning, and have a later start for students who need more sleep. With fewer students in school at the beginning and end of the day, the time can be used for planning time by teachers who are not directly involved with students at that time.
- Give teachers a common lunch period followed by a planning period for shared time daily. Provide a large group activity or smaller educational activities for kids after lunch. Have special electives and classes in the periods after lunch to free core classroom teachers.
- Identify a group of teachers and students to participate in longer class periods where academic subjects are integrated. The periods would start and end at the same time as the regular school day, but might be 2 long periods instead of 3 or 4 shorter ones. Students and teachers might meet in small or large groups, participate in extended lab time and field experiences, and stay together the entire year. This kind of flexibility in the schedule makes it more likely that teachers will be able to regularly schedule in time for planning.
- Lobby with the state to convert instructional days into staff development time.

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Changing Staffing Patterns

- Have all administrators regularly do some teaching.
- Hire more teachers and allow teachers to teach fewer classes per day.
- Bring in regular substitute teachers (the same teachers whenever possible) or specialist teachers once a week to take over the classes and free the regular teachers.
- Use other adults (administrators, volunteers, parents, instructional assistants) in the classroom to conduct an activity while teachers meet.
- Arrange field trips lead by volunteers, regular substitute teachers, or elective teachers that enhance or augment the curriculum to free time for planning.
- Have teachers teach fewer classes per term so they have a free period every day for planning.
- Assign six teachers to four classes to free teachers on a rotating basis.
- Hire P.E., Art and Music specialists to provide 30 free minutes a day for classroom teachers. Or schedule Music and P.E. at the same time for all kids in a grade so that there can be a grade-level meeting of teachers.
- Remove all duties, like recess duty, hall duty, and bus duty from teachers. Hire people to perform these duties. Give teachers duty-free lunch.
- Have a Hobby Period once a week. All adults in the school, including office staff, cafeteria workers, and instructional assistants, teach hobbies to students, freeing up teachers to meet. Parents or other community members could also be involved in a Hobby Period.
- A variation on Hobby Period could be the same use of staff, parents, and community members, but instead they might teach a foreign language, conduct a science experiment, or lead an activity that would in some way extend or apply academics or other content the students are learning.
- Set up a teaming structure within a block schedule. For example, during a day with a 3 hour block of time in the morning and 1 $^{1}/_{2}$ hour block in the afternoon, a team of four general education teachers, a special education teacher, and a teaching assistant have responsibility for 100 students for English, math, social studies, and science. The use of each block of time is totally within control of the teachers in the block. One week the schedule may be adjusted so those students have a double period of something. Teachers can suspend the typical class schedule all together and have students work in small groups. Teachers may give up some time from their own periods to other teachers who need more time. When students are in elective classes, the teaching team has time to meet.

- Form a partnership with a university or local college that could provide films, TV lessons, and demonstrations using interactive teaching arrangements that enrich the curriculum. If university partners handle instruction and design follow-up activities, paraprofessionals can handle the monitoring.
- Have teachers (Art, Music, and P.E.) who do not have classes of their own plan a half-day, integrated program for schools in the district. The program could rotate from school to school. During this time, the teachers in the school are free to meet.
- Have groups of students spend time each week with a business in the community, e.g., a video store, garden center, grocery store, book store, animal clinic, etc. The experience becomes an "apprenticeship" where students learn about the business and acquire skills and knowledge about the world of work.
- Encourage students to do volunteer community service activities one time a week while teachers plan.
- Have older students work with younger ones with minimal supervision so teachers can be free to meet.
- Group two smaller classes together with a different teacher, a substitute, a paraprofessional or volunteer to free the teachers.

Adding Time to the School Day or Year

- Shorten the amount of classroom time each day, but add more days to the school year to cover state requirements. Use the extra time saved from each day.
- Extend the school day by starting earlier or finishing later. Have special classes in the early morning periods. Then required hours are completed in four and a half days. This provides a free half-day each week.
- Move to a year-round schedule or extended school year by instituting summer classes. The extra time in school will provide numerous opportunities for time each day and/or chunks of time between terms for longer professional development courses or planning days.
- Add meeting days to the school year. For example, one school built 21 pupil-free workdays into the calendar for the year.
- Combine high school and adult evening school programs to provide continuous classes throughout the day. Adults and adolescents can attend classes together and structure their schedules to meet individual needs and to accommodate a variety of work patterns. With some students attending classes at night, teachers may have more time during the day for collaboration.

Final thoughts

Creating schedules for planning and collaboration takes time and thoughtfulness. But even the most well-planned schedule with ample amounts of time will not help if the time created is not used effectively and efficiently to improve teaching and learning. Although we know that the end of the day, when teachers are tired, is the worst time to meet, that is the time for which many meetings are scheduled. Meetings without a focus or agenda waste the time of all participants, yet many meetings could be characterized in this way. The challenge then is not only to create the time for planning and collaboration, but also to make the best use of this precious commodity once it has been created.

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